

A large Black Hawk helicopter is the central focus, tilted at an angle on a rocky, uneven ground. Several soldiers in military uniforms are visible around the helicopter. One soldier is in the foreground, partially obscured by the helicopter's body. Another soldier is visible in the background near the tail of the helicopter. The scene appears to be a battlefield or a training exercise. The title "Black Hawk" is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters.

“Black Hawk

Story by Heike Hasenauer

“P”EARL Harbor” producer Jerry Bruckheimer and Ridley Scott, director of “Hannibal” and “Gladiator,” spent months under the burning Moroccan sun to create the just-released movie “Black Hawk Down.”

An adaptation of the best-selling nonfiction book by Mark Bowden, the film recounts the danger, desperation, courage and sacrifice that punctuated the worst 18 hours of U.S. military ground combat in recent history — the nightmarish events of Oct. 3, 1993, in Mogadishu, Somalia.

“There’s no romance in this film, no underlying story. It’s strictly combat, as bad as it gets,” said actor Tom Sizemore, who played Tom Hanks’ first sergeant in “Saving Private Ryan.”

Sizemore portrays LTC Danny McKnight, commander of a convoy that was to take rangers and Delta Force commandos to safety after they’d captured several of Somali warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid’s men. But the convoy became terribly lost in the fog of battle.

“This movie definitely has no sentimentality,” Sizemore said. “It’s about 152 guys who are screwed. They’re the real heroes. I just portray one of them.”

Once again, the Army played an important role in supporting the film and contributing to its historical accuracy, Bruckheimer said.

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The film recreates the mission to capture Somali warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid. It was supposed to have been relatively easy, but then two Black Hawks crashed in the city and all hell broke loose.

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Wk Down"





"Black Hawk Down"

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"'Black Hawk Down' is not an exact depiction of characters and events," said retired Navy SEAL Harry Humphries, a technical advisor on the film. Some characters are composites of several rangers or commandos who were on the ground during the battle. SSG Matt Eversmann — whose "chalk" was the first to rope down into the target area, for example — figures prominently in the film, "but he does things other chalk leaders did," Humphries said.

In June 2001 Eversmann was on the set where the production crew filmed the return to the "Pakistani stadium" of a rescue convoy of United Nations troops and 10th Mountain Division soldiers. Tanks and armored personnel carriers carrying Pakistani and Malaysian markings — representative of the two nations that furnished the heavy equipment for the actual

SSG Matt Eversmann (right), whose "chalk" was the first to rope down into the target area, spent time on the set in Morocco with producer Jerry Bruckheimer.

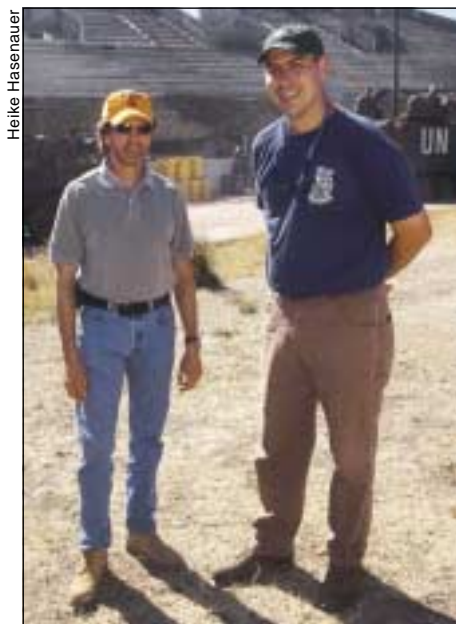
rescue — churned the earth and sent dirt clouds in every direction.

"The images have stirred memories, some that have made the hair on my neck stand up because they're such an actual depiction of the events of Oct. 3," said Eversmann.

"Obviously, a traumatic experience is something you live with every day. It will live with me forever. The mission is something I'm tremendously proud of. Yet, when we talk about the soldiers who died, I get very sad," he said.

"But I've made peace with what it means to be a ranger," said Eversmann, now a sergeant first class and operations sergeant at the U.S. Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pa.

The movie also highlights the heroic efforts of two Special Operations Command snipers, MSG Gary Gordon and SFC Randall Shughart, who were killed while attempting to rescue downed UH-60 pilot CW2 Michael Durant. The two were



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An MH-6 "Little Bird" helicopter of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment provides backup to U.S. forces on the ground in this recreated downtown Mogadishu scene.

awarded posthumous Medals of Honor.

Somali militiamen held Durant, who suffered numerous injuries in the crash, captive for 11 days. His captors released a videotape of his bruised, combat-weary face that was shown repeatedly on news programs around the world.

Josh Hartnett, who portrayed Army Air Corps pilot Danny Walker in "Pearl Harbor," plays Eversmann; Ron Eldard, of "Sleepers" and "ER" fame, is Durant; Johnny Strong and Nikolai Waldau are Shughart and Gordon, respectively, and Jeremy Piven plays ill-fated Black Hawk pilot CW2 Cliff Wolcott.

Others in the cast include William Fichtner, Jason Isaacs, Eric Bana, Ewan McGregor and Brian Van Holt.

Some 1,000 extras, from Morocco and several other African nations, portray the Somalis, said casting director Billy Dowd.

The production crew filmed largely in Salé, Morocco, near the capital city of Rabat, in areas that replicate the abject poverty of Mogadishu and precluded set designers from having to create major sets.

It's an area where children play barefoot in trash-covered dirt lots as cattle wander about. Ramshackle huts look like precariously connected scraps of wood, tin, cloth and cardboard.

In the marketplace, wiry peasants hawk their wares. And all around the city, women cloaked in long, plain shrouds and headscarves shuffle along dirt and concrete walkways.

"The toughest thing about making this movie is the location. It's filthy," said Sizemore, "But so was Mogadishu. This will be a great film about sophisticated urban, house-to-house warfare."

The Army became involved in the production in late 2000, said MAJ



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Crews from the 160th SOAR — not actors — fly the "Little Birds." The diminutive helicopters play a key role in the movie, as they did in the actual battle.

Andres Ortegon, the Army's liaison to the film industry from the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Los Angeles Branch.

Then, in March 2001, 22 actors underwent one week of ranger familiarization training sponsored by the 75th Ranger Regiment at Fort Benning, Ga.

To ensure accuracy, Ortegon monitored filming daily. He also reported to the Army staff regularly on the status of filming, the production company's requirements and use of military vehicles and personnel, and reimbursable expenses.

Units that were actually involved in the 1993 battle provided technical

advisors to the production crew through a U.S. Special Operations Command task force, the first task force ever established to support the making of a movie, Ortegon said.

They included retired COL Lee Van Arsdale, a former special operations commander; retired COL Tom Matthews, the 1993 air mission commander for Task Force Ranger's 1st Bn., 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment; and SPC John Collett, a ranger and SAW gunner

during the battle.

SSG Richard Botsford, from the 3rd Bn., 160th SOAR, who was on the Mogadishu airfield during the battle, also was an advisor. "I was attached to the 8th Bn., 101st Airborne Division, to maintain the Cobra helicopters of the 10th Mountain Div.," he said.

"On Oct. 4 and 5, five of us on the Cobra team loaded wounded and dead soldiers from the battle onto C-141s," he said. "Some of the wounded were hurt pretty bad."

Some 140 U.S. soldiers supported filming in Morocco, said Ortegon. They included rangers from Fort Benning, who viewers will see in the film rappelling from aircraft over "Mogadishu," and 160th SOAR crews who fly the Black Hawks and MH-6 and AH-6 "Little Birds" in aerial sequences.

"The most exciting part of filming



Actor William Fichtner, a veteran of the films "Pearl Harbor" and "The Perfect Storm," plays a fictional character, MSG Paul Howe.

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The Moroccan location lent an air of authenticity. Here, fresh meat hangs from a local merchant's stall at an alleyway market near the film site.



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was the gun runs on the rooftops at the Alamo crash site, where the first Black Hawk went down," said CW3 Dana Jones, a 160th SOAR pilot from the unit's Company A, 1st Bn., at Fort Campbell, Ky.

"'Somali militiamen' were all over the rooftops as we fired simulated

rounds," Jones said. "Explosions, made by gun-cap-type squibs attached along a string of wire, were going off all along the roof, and people were falling like dominoes. It was so realistic, at first we were a little shocked."

"Crashed" Black Hawks brought an eerie reality to the two crash-site sets, one of them in a partially created maze of dilapidated concrete and wood buildings.

"The downtown area is where the first helicopter crashed and where the guys huddled and tried to survive the night. When the U.N. convoy comes to the rescue, there's an unbelievable amount of firepower," said the film's publicist, Michael Singer.

In June 2001, CW3 Greg Dodson, a 160th SOAR pilot, spent a good part of a day with his Black Hawk sitting on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. He and others transformed the helicopter into a mock command-and-control Black Hawk that in the film flies low over the city.

On the ground, some 1,000 extras jumped out from behind every crevice and corner, sprang off rooftops firing frantically, yelling and screaming

At a local market in Rabat, Morocco's capital, residents sell their wares and conduct businesses from ramshackle huts that traverse entire city blocks.

obscurities and sometimes dropping "dead" in their tracks. The 1,000 will become 8,000 Somalis on screen, said special effects coordinator Timothy Burke.

Because the film's "Somalis" are armed with M-16 and AK-47 automatic rifles and M-60 machine guns, Moroccan army representatives monitored training of groups of 15 extras from a core group of 50, said armorer Steve Cummings.

"For filming the night scene, where the U.N. convoy arrives at the 'Pakistani stadium,' every weapon, including .50-caliber machine guns, was firing. We've gone through three tons of blank ammunition — about 250,000 rounds in about three months of shooting," Cummings said.

"We purchased 5-ton trucks and Humvees that we converted to hard-tops, then blew them up," Singer said. And special effects built MH-60 mock-ups so we could crash those."

"We recreated the joint operations center based on unclassified photos and helicopter footage of the attack," Bruckheimer added. In some cases, as with the target building in downtown Mogadishu, set designers had to construct facades on skeletal structures so they could destroy them.

The partially constructed stadium, to which the rescue convoy returns, will be completed in the computer, Burke said. In the movie, viewers will see a mosque in the background where a water tower actually stands.

Other location shots will be computer-enhanced for accuracy, Burke said. Hangar scenes depicting where the U.S. soldiers lived, and from where they launched their helicopters, were shot at a Moroccan air base north of Rabat.

"The air base at Mogadishu was located on the coast. Our 'air base,' 40 kilometers north of Rabat, in Kenitra, is close, but not close enough. So we'll establish its proximity to the ocean with visuals," Burke said.

For obvious safety reasons, "fantastic spiraling stunt-flying sequences were filmed out over the ocean instead of over the actual sets, and will be married up with location shots, Burke said.



While the dirt and decay of portions of Morocco mimic the streets of Mogadishu, so too do its colorful markets and people.



At the “Alamo” crash site, where the first Black Hawk went down during the real battle, SSG Matt Eversmann, played by Josh Hartnett (*inset, at right*), was holed up for one of the longest nights of his life.



Special effects will also replicate some of the more personal, human atrocities of battle. One of the most horrifying incidents was when PVT Richard Kowalewski, who was riding in one of the trucks in the initial rescue convoy, was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. It “rocketed in from the left, severing his left arm and entering his chest,” according to a passage in Bowden’s book. “There was an explosion, but most of the two-foot-long missile embedded itself in Kowalewski...”

“We’ll animate the RPG to look

like it is embedded in the actor,” said Burke. “In a later scene, where he’s evacuated, we’ll use an actual model attached to the actor’s body.”

“While the movie will not be a documentary, it’s the most detailed account of the battle that I’ve seen,” said Matthews, who was in the air for 18 hours on Oct 3, 1993.

“We went to get two of Aidid’s men,” Matthews said. “We policed them up. But after 30 minutes, the element of surprise wore off. When the first Black Hawk got hit, we got a whole new mission. There were eight

Americans on that bird. We completed our mission. We got Aidid’s cronies back to our air base.

“How did the convoy get so lost?” Matthews said. “After it got the prisoners, it had to go to another location. There was no signal, no flare indicating where the guys on the ground had to go. They wanted to move as fast as they could.

Drivers were wounded and others had to take the wheel. Windows were shattered. It was easy to miss a turn. When they did, the alleys were so narrow, the whole convoy couldn’t just turn around.

“We were fired on continually,” Matthews explained. Five aircraft were shot down: Durant’s, Wolcott’s and three that crashed in other parts of the city. Two of the aircraft made it back to the airfield.

“Our soldiers displayed a phenomenal amount of courage that day as thousands of bullets and hundreds of RPGs were fired at us,” Matthews said. “Urban-combat operations are as dirty as it gets, because you can see only from one building to the next. The technology edge is limited as soon as I can see you and you can see me.”

MAJ James Viola, currently a member of the 2nd Bn., 160th SOAR, was a platoon leader for the MH-6 “Little Birds” in Mogadishu and was officer in charge of the 160th SOAR task force on the film set.

“I was in the JOC when the battle kicked off. I was against the wall and thought: ‘If we were in an academic



Special operations troops in Mogadishu were attacked by hundreds of Somalis, who fired on them from rooftops, alleyways and doorways.



"Black Hawk Down"

environment, something like this couldn't go so wrong," Viola said.

"I'd always wondered, 'Will we actually do the mission the way we train to do it?' We'd do the communication the same, different elements would be on different frequencies. Bowden's book makes it sound like there was a communication problem because everyone couldn't talk to each other at once," Viola said.

"There were some small errors due to the fog of battle," he continued. "For example, from the air, telling someone to take a left would be different from being on the ground and telling them to go left. The guys were running along the street and we tried to pick them up..."

"I was in the air Oct. 3. I'd been in Somalia since August," Viola said. "The Little Birds weren't hit much. A few mortar attacks were all we'd ever gotten. I was down at the recreated site where Wolcott crashed. It was real eerie. It took me a few days to realize 'This is just a movie.'"

John Collett, a SP4 SAW gunner in 1993, had been on the movie set since February. "It was hard to deal with during the first few weeks," he said. "In my platoon, CPL Jamie Smith, one of the real-life soldiers focused on in the film, was killed."

Smith's story was among the worst. Medics in his unit worked to keep him alive and prayed for the rescue convoy to get him to a doctor. A bullet had hit Smith in the thigh and traveled up into his groin, piercing major blood vessels. The medics had to reach inside Smith's abdomen trying to find and clamp the vessels.

Collett came out of the battle physically unscathed. "Our team leader, SGT Randy Ramaglia, was with me when a bullet just grazed my shoulder, taking the flag off my uniform. It passed me and took a chunk out of Ramaglia's underarm," said Collett, who left the Army in 2001 as a sergeant first class.

"The convoy took the most hits," Sizemore added. "Six soldiers were killed, and there were numerous wounded. McKnight told me that watching the kids get slaughtered was tough.

"The guys who were actually there don't really share their emotions with

Heike Hasenauer



Pilots from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment fly the "Little Bird" and Black Hawk helicopters in the film in various scenes.

anyone," Sizemore said. "But, you'll see it sometimes. John Collett had to leave the set when 'Jamie Smith' got killed."

"I read the book and looked at research documents," said actor Steven Ford. He plays a fictitious soldier named Joe Cribbs, an aide to TF Ranger commander MG William Garrison, played by Sam Shepard.

"It really came into focus for me when I met the guys who walked those streets in Mogadishu and fired the weapons," Ford said.

"The world moves so fast," Ford said. "This was a three-to-four-day blip on the CNN radar screen. If you missed it, you missed it.

"This film will highlight a very important event for the Army, credit those who fought, and tell the stories about the people who lost their lives," he said. "Most people will never know what it's like to be 6,000 miles from home and have to make split-second decisions. I slept well at home before participating in this movie, but after meeting these guys, I'll sleep even better. My respect for the U.S. military forces has always been high, but it's gone up even more." □

Heike Hasenauer



The Black Hawks that crashed in Mogadishu (recreated here for the film) crashed in confined spaces, which made rescue of their crews extremely difficult.

BACKGROUND to a Battle

U.S. military involvement in war-torn Somalia began in 1992 as a humanitarian-aid mission to feed the African nation's starving people. It culminated on Oct. 3, 1993, with the deaths of 18 soldiers in what U.S. military officials called the worst ground combat since the Vietnam War.

Eighty-four soldiers were wounded, some of them seriously.

"In December 1992, when we initially went into Somalia, hundreds of people were starving. We fed them," said retired COL Tom Matthews, the air mission commander for Task Force Ranger's 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, during the battle.

"With the March 1993 transition to United Nations control, the focus changed to maintaining peace, including disarming the Somalis," Matthews said.

In June 1993 Somali warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid's clan massacred 24 Pakistani peacekeepers, "literally skinning them alive. Then the U.N. mission progressed to a U.N. 'Chapter 7' mission, which means you can use force if necessary," Matthews said.

"A month later we were now at war, and a \$25,000 bounty was put on Aidid's head," he said.

For TF Ranger—a U.S. Special Operations Command force composed of soldiers from Company B, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, from Fort Benning, Ga.; special operations soldiers from Fort Bragg, N.C.; 160th SOAR aviators from Fort Campbell, Ky., and Hunter Army Airfield, Ga.; and a crack combat search-and-rescue team—the mission in Somalia was to have been fairly easy.

"In two months we 'spun' up—prepared to react to missions—about 40 times," Matthews said. "We did it to numb the population to our presence. We actually executed six missions before this—three

at night, three during the day.

"In all of those missions, collectively, I took two bullets in my helicopter," Matthews said. "And I'd seen a total of maybe 12 rocket-propelled grenades fired. But in those 18 hours, the Somalis probably fired 200 to 300 RPGs at us."

On the day of the Mogadishu battle, special-operations force soldiers and rangers were to be flown to an area near the target building. After roping down, the SOF troops would storm the building as rangers formed a perimeter on the streets surrounding it. The SOF soldiers would extract two of Aidid's top men, and everyone would return to the rear without incident, via a ground convoy of nine Humvees and three 5-ton trucks.

The assault force included some 160 men. In the ground convoy, commanded by LTC Danny McKnight, four members of a Navy SEAL team augmented rangers and SOF operators.

Four rocket-armed AH-6 "Little Bird" helicopters provided air support. Four MH-6 troop-carrier versions of the small helicopter were fitted with benches mounted on both sides below the doors. They carried the SOF personnel, the spearhead of the assault force.

Additionally, eight Black Hawk helicopters delivered some of the SOF soldiers, the rangers, the CSAR team and two mission commanders—LTC Tom Matthews, who coordinated with 160th SOAR pilots, and the SOF unit's LTC Gary Harrell, who commanded troops on the ground.

The men had performed missions like this many times before. But this mission, expected to take roughly an hour, lasted 18 hours. During that time, two of the task force's Black Hawks crashed in the most populated area of the city, and the convoy that was intended to get the troops out became lost.

Suddenly, the task force took on a whole



Heike Hasenauer

An Army helicopter — one of several supporting the filming of "Black Hawk Down" — flies an aerial sequence near rugged cliffs on Morocco's coast.

new mission—to rescue the downed helicopter crews. The first Black Hawk, piloted by CW2 Cliff Wolcott, went down in a narrow alley after being hit by an RPG. The second bird, piloted by CW2 Michael Durant, crashed in a small courtyard surrounded by ramshackle huts.

Outnumbered U.S. troops were pinned down in the littered city streets as thousands of Somali militiamen and civilians let loose a hail of gunfire and RPGs.

For Americans, the brutal reality of combat intensified with the Oct. 4 CNN broadcast of Somali mobs dragging the battered, lifeless bodies of U.S. soldiers through Mogadishu's filthy streets.

Red Cross officials later estimated 500 Somalis were killed and thousands wounded.

The episode in Mogadishu raised considerable controversy throughout the military and civilian sectors about when U.S. soldiers should be deployed to potentially hostile areas, how many should be sent and what type of back up should be in place. — Heike Hasenauer